

Productivity Plan - June 2024

We have developed a productivity plan which outlines what the council has done in previous years as well as our summarising our current plans to continue to transform and improve our organisation and our services.

The council has a strong track record over the last few years in delivering a range of high-quality services and continually making improvements. Resident satisfaction with both the place and the council is high and significantly above the regional and national averages.

The council is in a strong financial position, with prudent financial management resulting in significant income streams, revenue and capital reserves and no borrowing. Recent data published by the Office for Local Government rated the council second best in the country for its finances out of all councils. This approach has meant we have been able to keep our part of council tax low for our residents whilst investing in frontline services.

We are focused on continually improving and becoming more efficient and effective. This document summarises our plans to become an even better council.

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How we have transformed the way we design and deliver services to make better use of resources

Guided by a [new council plan \(/councilplan\)](#) and a target operating model we have been redesigning the way the Council operates and our organisational culture to maximise the positive impact of our resources for our communities.

Examples have included:

Taking a longer-term financial planning and management approach guided by a prudent four-year [Medium Term Financial Strategy](#) (<https://democracy.basingstoke.gov.uk/documents/s33370/Appendix%201%20Medium%20Term%20Financial%20Strategy%202023-2027>) This approach has proved really effective in setting a minimum of 2-year balanced budgets and reducing any future budget cuts to the MTFS.

Utilizing priority-based budgeting to ensure our funding is targeted at our key priorities in the Council Plan. This recognises that some services are more important to our communities than others and so we prioritise those services that are most important to our communities. This has led to us investing more in our key frontline services for our residents.

Redesigning services guided by our council plan priorities and target operating model with a focus on improvement and maximum value for our residents. This has led to significant improvements in performance as well as efficiencies.

Guided by a new property strategy and strategic asset management plan, reshaping our asset portfolio and approach to asset management. Our portfolio and investments now deliver approximately £26 million per annum in income to the council to fund services with an average return on investment of 43% of the council's total funding.

Examples have included:

Rationalizing and sharing our office accommodation as part of implementation of a new hybrid working model leading to savings in carbon.

Strengthening our approach to the management and delivery of key projects through the introduction of a programme manager. The PMO provides support and expertise to projects and is the home for governance, cost control and standards assurance realisation of benefits and minimises project and cost risk to the organisation.

Becoming a more collaborative council, working in partnership through different structures, with the police, NHS, voluntary and neighbouring councils including delivering services on their behalf.

Regularly evolving and reshaping our management structures to ensure we have the right structures and skills to continually improve. The last set of changes resulted in a £140k per annum saving.

A range of work to improve our organisational culture and ensure it is supportive, collaborative and improvement focused.

Reviewing and refining central activities such as treasury management and our capital spend needs and how to best meet them.

Ensuring we have sensible reserves which are set based on a risk-based approach which assesses the council's key financial risks including reviewing key areas and assumptions within the estimates, realism of income targets and saving proposals, interest rate exposure, third party provider risks, and any other potential risks. A full review of reserves is part of the budget setting process.

We regularly test our productivity and how we are doing through a range of ways. The council has a comprehensive performance management framework setting out a series of performance measures and targets informed by benchmarking where possible. Progress is monitored and reviewed regularly through the council's performance management approach. This includes monitoring and review by services, the council's Leadership Team, Overview and Scrutiny, the relevant Portfolio Holder and Cabinet. Early action is taken with improvement plans and a board established, chaired by the CEO or Deputy CEO, if any areas performance goes off track. This performance focused approach is an integral part of our corporate planning process. We are committed to continually reviewing our performance and strive to achieve the highest possible standards to make sure that we are meeting the needs of our communities in the most effective way. We are continuing to refine this approach using new business intelligence tools that ensure more precise data collection and for them to be shared in the most accessible and transparent way.

[Performance indicators \(https://www.basingstoke.gov.uk/performance\)](https://www.basingstoke.gov.uk/performance)

Every 2 years we commission an externally run residents survey to test our resident's satisfaction of the place, the council and our services. The results are then used to update our Council Plan and improvement plans.

[A summary of our latest resident survey](#)

<https://www.basingstoke.gov.uk/content/page/81166/Basingstoke%20and%20Deane%20Residents'%20Survey%202022%20-%20Executive%20summary.pdf>

We also look to regularly test ourselves externally and so in November 2022 undertook a [Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge \(/peer-challenge\)](#). The peer challenge team found we were “an ambitious council, with a legacy of strong financial management” and provided “good quality services for its residents”. The council has delivered an action plan based on the team's recommendations including further refinement of performance management, a reshaping of the committee functions, and alignment of certain services together to further improve synergies. As part of the Corporate Peer Challenge process, we undertake the opportunity to have a progress review with the peer team six months after agreeing the action plan. This was carried out in August 2023. [The progress review report from the LGA \(https://www.basingstoke.gov.uk/content/doclib/4059.pdf\)](#) was received in October 2023. It said: “The peer team was impressed with and strongly commended the breadth, depth and scale of activity that had taken place in the 10 months since the Corporate Peer Challenge, across the 12 recommendations”.

Over the next two years we will continue to drive the improvement of the council and its services including:

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Redesigning frontline services to realise efficiencies and improve the way our customers experience our services, enabled by new technology (see section 2 below on our new Customer Experience Strategy and Digital Strategy).

Continuing to reshape and modernise our asset portfolio to increase net income that can be used to fund services for our communities.

Redesigning support services to realise efficiencies.

Continuing to evolve our structures to ensure we always have the right skills for the future stages of our improvement journey and to realise savings where possible.

How we plan to take advantage of technology and make better use of data to improve decision making, service design and use of resource

We are continually developing our approach to this. For example, we recently implemented a new Enterprise Resource Programme (ERP) replacing the individual Finance, Payroll and HR systems to provide consistency in information and one source of the true financial position. A key element of ensuring that the council has ongoing excellence in financial management and planning is to ensure that our managers and the wider workforce understand what good financial management practices are to ensure consistency of approach and process. The implementation of the new ERP system has helped to enable this. This has been further supported by a full review and restructure of the Financial Services team to ensure that the organisation is effectively supported.

A new Customer Experience Strategy, adopted in 2023, puts customers at the heart of everything we do, understanding what the data we hold is telling us and engaging directly with customers. A big focus moving forward will be further reviewing and refining our services to improve how our customers experience them. This is both through traditional methods such as phone and face to face but also crucially improving the digital experience of our services, as more and more people interact with us this way. Our new Digital Strategy is closely aligned to this and forms the basis of the modernisation of the council's digital and technology capabilities required to support the more agile and efficient delivery of services to customers. The Digital Strategy focuses on optimisation of the existing technology and practical, incremental innovation required for the continuous improvement of our digital systems and shifts the focus towards utilisation of data as a strategic asset.

A fundamental element of the recently adopted Digital Strategy is the better utilisation of data. As part of implementing a new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system we are preparing a proof of concept to use predictive & free text analytics for understanding customer sentiment and how that can be used, for example, early interventions to prevent complaints and finding opportunities for proactive resident engagements through 'weak signals' in data. We are also exploring the realistic use cases of artificial intelligence in areas such as administrative tasks and improving our cyber security processes. This also complements our performance monitoring process.

Moving forward we will be looking to fully understand and embrace the developing opportunities provided by artificial intelligence to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of how we operate.

Our plans to reduce wasteful spend within our organisation and systems

We utilise a robust budget setting and monitoring process guided by our priorities in the Council Plan through our priority-based budget approach. This includes detailed reviews and challenge of existing budgets to identify areas that could be reduced or are no longer required.

Planning and budgeting in this way means we are always ensuring our funding is focused on what we are trying to achieve, and the impact for our customers, rather than systems, processes and practices.

The council also takes a proactive approach to service improvement and investment where appropriate to improve value for money. In 2023 council approved a new capital scheme to acquire May Place House, a key supported living facility. This is a strategic priority of our Housing and Homelessness Strategy and will deliver vastly improved supported housing for the

most vulnerable former/potential rough sleepers, as part of its ongoing drive to end rough sleeping and prevent homelessness in the borough. The building, which offers up to 20 emergency beds for single people at risk of homelessness, is currently owned by London and Quadrant Housing Trust. The acquisition of the building allows the council to provide improved facilities, and have more control over the provision of services, achieving better value for money than the existing arrangements.

The council takes its EDI work seriously with residents, communities and the council's own workforce. The council has spent in total of £2,150 in the past two years. We have established 3 staff networks in the past year and have spent a total number of 6 hours on meetings for all networks. One of our Directors is also an executive sponsor for EDI who promotes the benefits of this across the council and drives tangible, positive change. In the past year we have spent 14 hours on EDI training, which included sessions on Introduction to Neurodiversity, Deaf awareness training, understanding sexual orientation and gender identity and sessions on allyship. The training has raised awareness and understanding for staff, how we support colleagues and how we can take meaningful action to tackle inequality. Effectiveness of the training sessions and activities is measured through evaluation forms in sessions and feedback shows these are highly valued.

Spend on consultancy is minimised where possible, making use of internal knowledge and expertise where possible. However, there are a number of significant projects that require specialist legal and property advice, to ensure that council's interests are protected and that decision making is based on appropriate information.

Consultancy spend in 2023/24 totalled £0.78M, of which £0.53M relates to Manydown, a very large garden community development, which requires specialist advice due to complex nature of the transaction. Other spend includes £0.04M on specialist building surveys for asbestos and RAAC, and £0.03M specialist Treasury Management advice required to support the management of our investment activities, which generated over £6M in income. Agency spend in 2023/24 totalled £0.43M, which is mainly (£0.38M) for legal services.

The council operates a robust governance process for spend through the Leadership Team, Overview and Scrutiny, Audit and Accounts Committee and Cabinet, monitoring revenue and capital budgets, treasury management and investment and asset management plans. The Council Plan monitoring process, performance management framework and PMO ensure the council tracks its delivery across all its services, projects and investments.

In regard to sharing office accommodation, in 2022 we were able to establish a public service campus at our offices. As part of introducing a hybrid working model and rationalising our own office accommodation, we have been able to move our councillors and staff into a refurbished building which has freed up office space on our wider site which we have let to Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust. Hampshire Constabulary also lease the top floor of that building. As such we now have a range of key public service partners located together.

Moving forward we are looking at opportunities to further improve the efficiency of our office accommodation from a service delivery, cost and carbon perspective.

The barriers preventing progress that the Government can help to reduce or remove

In particular greater freedoms, certainty, engagement and consistency would really help councils to respond to the needs of their local communities.

This would include:

More flexibility for councils to fully set their own council tax level, fees and charges would be beneficial so that councils can fully respond to local circumstances.

Multi-year, rather than one-year, financial settlements will provide more certainty to medium and long-term planning across the sector. This includes replacements for funding streams such as new homes bonus.

Government more fully considering the impact on councils and local level monitoring before making policy decisions and setting national priorities and engaging in earlier more detailed dialogue with councils as national policies are developed to explore what is important and deliverable locally.

A consistent set of key performance data so that councils can benchmark their performance with other councils.
